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ZeroCircles

by Daniel Dancer

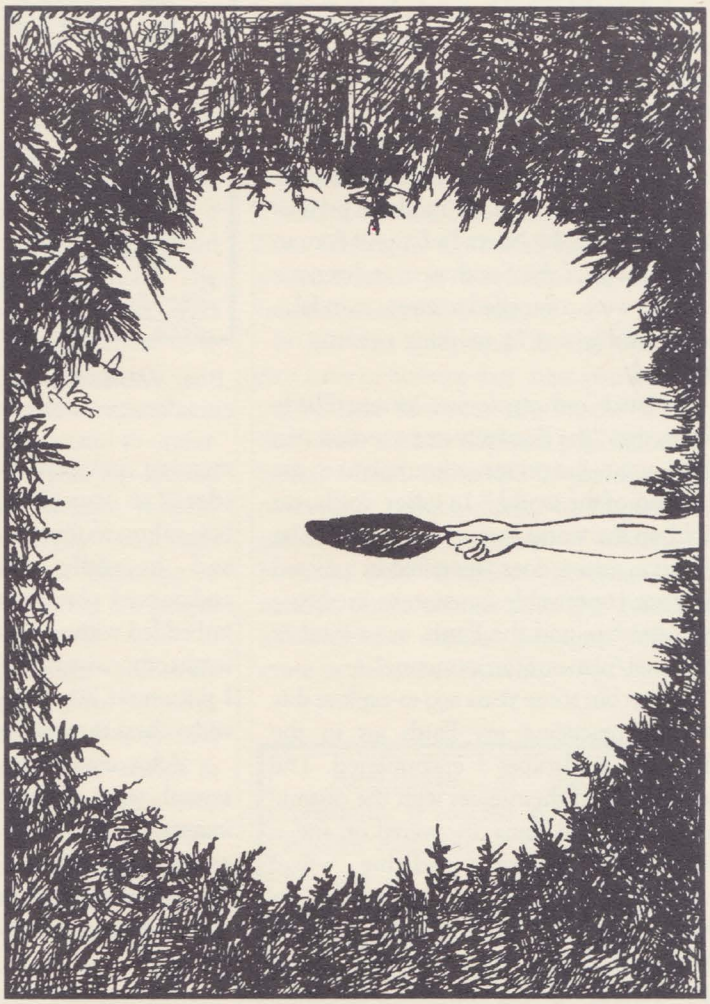
Instead of asking what we can do to change the world, we must ask as well, what can we do to bless it.

—Sister Merriam McGillis

Art has always nudged society in one direction or another, sometimes functioning as a catalyst for radical change, other times merely supporting the status quo. As we approach the millennium, art's capacity to spark transformation becomes increasingly relevent since we are all living within a culture whose notion of progress is dependent upon gobbling up the Earth. While scientific and economic arguments for nature preservation are powerful and convincing, they are not enough to shift our course. Our drives run very deep, and to change them we must create new stories and do meaningful art about our relationship to the land. This, not science, may ultimately capture people's hearts and minds to reawaken our native connection to nature.

With this notion in mind, I recently launched The Zero-Circles Project, a strategic blend of art, spirit and environmental politics designed to help end commerical logging on Public Lands. I am doing this project through the auspices of Interspecies Communication Inc.

To understand ZeroCircles, it first seems essential to give a bit of my own personal history. One winter morning while walking along a beach on the isolated Quinault Indian Reservation of Washington's Olympic peninsula, I made a discovery that forever altered the course of my life. Dimly lit, in a swirling fog, I came upon a group of tall multi-colored feathers rising from the sand, within a circle of smooth, wave-tumbled stones. The beach was deserted. Set high above the surf-line, there was no evidence to discern when the arrangement had been crafted. My golden retriever sniffed the feathers while I sat beside the circle watching the waves break in the grey dawn. I'm a photographer, so I took a photo in black and white, and later tacked the print above my desk. Gradually, I became enchanted by the power that seemed to emanate from that circle. It seemed to hold the intent of our species, something lost and ancient, something from the source. About the time I found the circle, the Quinault had just finished clearcutting their entire reservation, leaving only a thin strip along the beach.



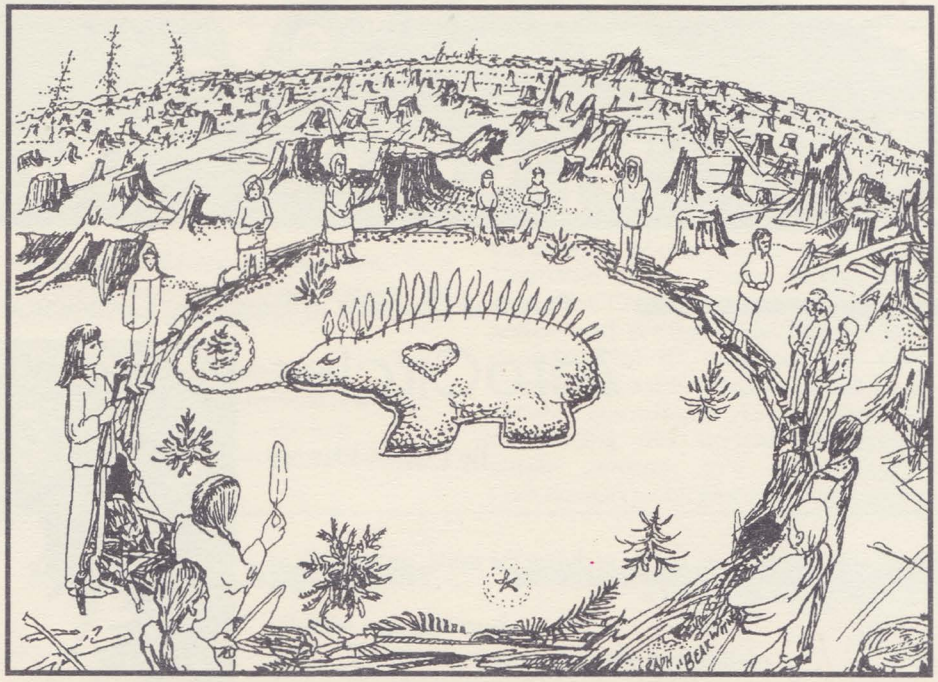
Black Elk's Circle, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, WA. An eagle feather salute to a perfect ring of old growth which lines the lip of a small cinder cone.

I believe the rock and feather shrine was a response to the human assault on our planet to which we are all complicit, to some degree. Perhaps the sculpture was a simple native prayer, a way to help dispel the techno-trance that grips the world. Or maybe it was the planet responding to its pain through the imagination of one who was still in touch with their earth-mind. I sensed the planet treating itself much as I, myself, attempt to heal an ailment through herbs or visualization. Though I will never learn the origin of that organic, oceanside mandala, its image still reflects its magic above my desk and I am grateful to its creator.

As children, many of us were "Earth artists," arranging rocks, sand, sticks and such in various spontaneous forms. Who can say why we did it? It just seemed necessary, like breathing, or perhaps we are guided by instinct to maintain our connection to the sacred circle of life. On a simplistic level, any child who ever builds such a sculpture is engaged in mandala-making. Mandala is the sanskrit word for "circle", and defined by psychologist Judith Cornell as "a concrete symbol of its creator's absorption into a sacred center." Mandalas serve as artistic tools for healing and transformation in Native American sand painting, Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist rituals and in modern psycho-therapy. From the Nazca Indians of Peru to the Pueblos of the Southwest, indigenous cultures were compelled to create mandalas of an earthly sort by marking patterns on the land.

Noted anthropologist, Mircea Eliade writes that "the discovery or projection of a fixed point–the center–is equivalent to the creation of the world." In other words, we hold up the world through sacred art. The question arises: does art crafted in a sacred manner conceivably function as medicine for ourselves and the Earth, as a kind of personal/planetary acupuncture?

I set out some years ago to explore this notion, practicing my Earth art in the degraded landscapes I encountered. The works shaped themselves with the organic and man-made items discovered on site: a four-colored mayan medicine wheel composed of plastic trash on a beach in Mexico, a driftwood beluga with a red-heart from a whaler's discarded sleeping bag in the Arctic, a big bluestem I-Ching hexgram on a plowed Kansas prairie. In every project I made, a kind of alchemy occurred–a sense of personal merger with the imagination of the wild. Earth art became my ceremonial method to become more present with Nature and hopefully, to express the sorrow I felt over its abuse by our species. The resulting eco-mandalas, are the deepest way I know to give thanks for the bounty that sustains us, as well as to activate a protective response from our culture while there is still time. Just as the Australian Aborigines painted animals to ensure that the real ones remained, an eco-mandala composed in a clearcut or at the edge of an open-pit mine, honors the wild beauty lost, so that it may endure elsewhere and hopefully return again. Each endangered place I worked had a prayer imbedded within it and without this art, it might otherwise have escaped notice. Once I put prayer into form, I shared this work with others through story and photograph.



Bear Witness Circle, Chugach National Forest, Alaska. Activists and their children circle around a bear made of mounded moss in the middle of a clearcut.

After constructing eco-mandalas for several years, I gathered the resulting images of beauty, destruction and art to create *Sacred Ground-Sacred Sky: An Eco Experience* which toured the nation for six years through Exhibits USA.

Invocation

From wild shorelines to clearcut forests, the shards of industrial culture abound in tangled lengths of wire and twine, tatters of colored fabric, oil containers, plastic utensils, rusty engine parts, the list of refuse seems endless. Outside the city, the organic shards of nature still predominate and I derive considerable hope from this. Stones and feathers, seeds and shells, wood and bone, ash and silica: of this we are born and in this we dwell. According to modern physics as well as ancient Buddhism, everything is just space and molecules. Every atom in each of us existed before organic life emerged 4 billion years ago. Just as we are the progeny of minerals, something we can barely imagine surely arises from the detritrus of our industrial world. Bringing the organic and the man-made into an artful holistic relationship makes sense in ways more easily intuited than articulated. "The power of the world always works in circles" declared Black Elk. Unification. Consolidation. Wholeness. These are old and hopeful notions. In my own way, I struggle to activate them. "Art is the great weapon." declared Andy Warhol.

For The Trees

Having worked for many years as an environmental photographer documenting nature's beauty and destruction, I have come to sense that something is lacking in our effort to educate and activate people to protect our last ancient forests. I was the lead photographer for *CLEARCUT: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry*, a coffeetable book published by the Sierra Club, documenting forest devastation across North America. With great hope, Clinton, Gore and each member of Congress were

presented with a copy. And yet just eight months later they unleashed the Salvage Rider, arguably the worst piece of anti-environmental legislation in recent history, suspending all environmental laws in our forests for one year. Thousands of acres of old-growth, previously off-limits, fell to the saw. Although the book was timely, and its promotion was often brilliant, the issue was more urgent than the message was able to address.

Less than five percent of our nation's original forests remain and they are almost entirely on public lands. One has to wonder how we let the situation get so grim. Image is partly to blame. Map makers color our national forests green, which lends them the illusion of protection. Even the capitalized adjective, "National", as in National Park, conveys protection. Both the forest service and the timber corporations have been careful to line the highways that pass through national forests with "beauty strips"–a facade of trees that makes it impossible to see what's happening without actually parking our cars and walking inside the forest.

A paltry four percent of our nation's annual timber supply comes from national forests, and such logging is conducted at an annual loss to American taxpayers of over $300 million a year, not counting the lost value of clean water, wildlife and recreation. Iowa republican Representative Jim Leach, testified that "the U.S. government is the only property owner that I know of that pays private parties to deplete its own resources."

The Zero-Cut solution, endorsed by hundreds of conservation groups, seeks to protect what is left and begin healing the rest by ending all commercial logging on public lands. The people of the United States support this effort; a recent Republican poll showed that seventy percent of Americans favor ending logging in our national forests. A bipartisan bill recently introduced in Congress called The National Forest Protection and Restoration Act (H.R.2789) would:

1) Protect our National Forests and other federal public lands nationwide by ending the ecologically destructive timber sales program

2) Redirect timber subsidies into worker retraining and ecological restoration

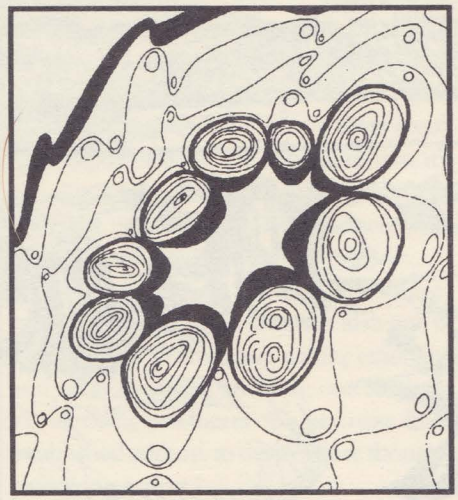
3) Save taxpayers at least $300 million annually.

Aesthetic Elements

IC's ZERO-CIRCLES Project may be the missing aesthetic element in the initiative to solve our forest crisis. It is an effort to promote a zero cut on public lands by facilitating the actual construction and documentation of zeroes in all of our national forests.

Of course, the zero is also a circle, and, as I've already pointed out, this is humanity's oldest symbol of wholeness and healing, representing the cycles of life and the path we have traveled in our relationship to trees. We came to a continent draped in virgin forest and cut them relentlessly until now only tattered remnants remain. It's time to circle back, time for all the divergent forces that have been working to protect our forests to unite to begin the restoration. The ZeroCircles we create symbolize our solidarity in this effort.

Starhawk has written that "it's too late for anything but magic." Call it magic, call it artful activism, and never forget that the story is far from finished. All who love, cherish and work to protect the Earth hold some strong cards. I am hopeful that the ZeroCircles Project is one of them and that by playing it in concert with other efforts, by adding it to the greater story, a new relationship with our forests will be born. Each circle becomes a link in a chain connecting all our forests together–a chain symbolizing the unity of everyone working to protect the forests as whole living systems vital to our survival on this planet.



CowpieCircle, 7600 foot, Okanagan National Forest. Why are cattle allowed to graze in the fragile alpine meadows of a nationally-designated wilderness area, which are federally legislated to remain forever wild?

Each circle built from found materials, or occasionally people, will depict a different aspect of the condition of our national forests. Some will show the beauty, others the destruction. Linked together, they will convey the importance of resurrecting OUR National Forests as refuges from all commerical extraction which was the original intent of Congress when it established them 100 years ago.

To fulfill this project, I intend to construct fifty ZeroCircles by the year 2000. So far, twenty-three have been completed in seven states. My own completed circles have also begun to inspire others to create and document their own forest circles.

A dynamic web-site has been constructed on the Internet to display the circles and provide information about the condition of each national forest. Via the Net, both the media and the public can follow the progress of the ZeroCircles campaign, learn about Zero-Cut legislation, send letters to their representatives, and network with regional conservation groups working on this and related issues. Translating the circles into action to protect our forests is the goal. Check it out for yourself at:

www.zerocircles.com

How To Participate.

First of all, don't be intimidated by the word "artist." In an earlier time, art was not something *others* did for *us* to view, or purchase to display on the walls and tables of our homes. Instead, doing art was simply a part of life. It empowered us. It gave meaning to our lives and connected us to the whole. Rediscover the connection this art of old once provided and build a

circle soon in a national forest near you. And remember, these are YOUR forests. You have every right to do this.

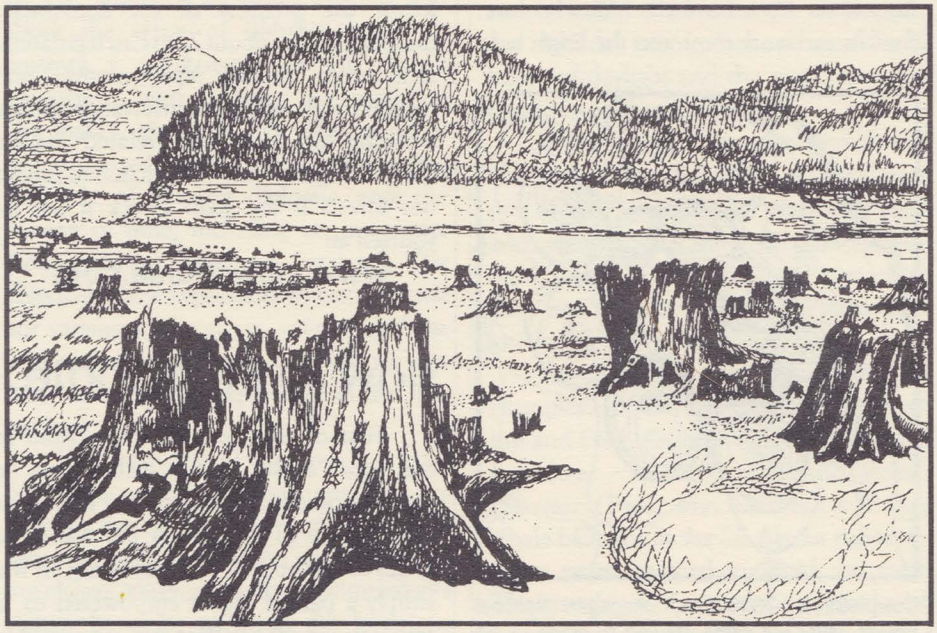
Highlight something that bothers you or delights you, build a zerocircle from things you find on the site (check the web site for circle ideas and photo tips) and send it back to us along with a paragraph or two describing the situation. We will add it to ZeroCircles website. If enough circles are built the story will activate the media, and the word will get out that it's time to end commercial logging on public lands. The circle is our rallying cry. It is our demand for change.

Send a print or slide of your circle with a descriptive paragraph to: Zero-Circles Project, PO Box 693, Mosier, OR 97040 This project is being conducted by Daniel Dancer under the auspices of Interspecies Communication, Inc. and contributions can be sent to, "ZERO-CIRCLES, C/O Interspecies Communication, 273 Hidden Meadow Lane, Friday Harbor, WA 98250.

The Zero-Circles Project and those people associated with it do not in any way advocate the violation of Federal Law. We suggest that any materials used to create a circle be returned to their original place of origin once the circle has been photographed and fulfilled its function. It may therefore be useful to know the Forest Service Book of Codes and Regulations. The following sections may apply: 261.9 Property: (a) Damaging any natural feature or other property of the United States. 261.10 Occupancy and use. The following are prohibited: (a) Constructing, placing, or maintaining any kind of road, trail, structure, fence, enclosure, communication equipment, or other improvement on National Forest system land or facilities without a special-use authorization, contract, or approved operating plan.

Nature Films

Daniel Dancer's ZeroCircles project grew partially out of his own personal disenchantment with nature photography. He believes the problem is mostly one of intention; too many professional photographers focusing their lenses on beautiful wilderness scenery to sell products that mar the same landscapes they lionize. Nature thus becomes one more image drafted in service to sell the products of the worldwide macro-economy.



Firechain Circle, Willamette National Forest, Oregon. A long chain found at the edge of a nearby dammed river was coiled and set afire with siponed gasoline in a "ghost grove" of once ancient giant firs and cedars.

For somewhat the same reason, I have long been an outspoken critic of the TV nature film business. As media scholar, George Gerbner, has written, "A handful of chief executives, [at Sony, Time-Warner, General Electric, Rupert Murdoch and Disney] maybe five or six men, determines the stories that socialize our children." If it's true, every parent should seriously think about turning off their TV for good. As a working nature writer–a person who constructs metaphors and symbols as artful teaching tools–I am painfully aware that to build a sustainable future we must figure out a way to change our stories. This is a key bond that Daniel and I share.

I first became cognizant of this need for better stories while working to liberate three gray whales caught in the sea ice outside Barrow Alaska in 1987. Watching TV journalists assemble daily to give a two minute precis of the situation, I noticed that the reports usually resembled baseball box scores enumerating the significant statistics surrounding the rescue: 3 whales, $600,000 expediture, 200 saviors, etc.

When I offered this analogy to one of the reporters, he asked how I would alter the form and content of the story. I answered that both the whales and the Arctic pose monumental mysteries to the human imagination. This was the real inspiration for the rescue, and the primary reason it had all but bumped the final days of the 1988 US presidential election off the airwaves. I suggested to him that the reporters would tell a more evocative story by translating that essential mystery so home viewers could feel it as well.

"Great," answered the reporter, "but how do we do that."

I suggested his TV network plant a camera focused on the whale's breathing hole, and simply let it run for an hour, or even five minutes, but without sound bites, statistics, or advertising. The reporter pointed out to me that TV news rarely permits unedited, unadvertised footage onto the air, making me realize the story-telling failure was embedded in the medium itself. While the reporter clearly stood in awe of the vast scale of the rescue, he believed my "show" would prove the ultimate boredom for a home audience.

Made-for-TV nature films don't do much better than the news media to

present thoughtful visions of the wild. With so many nature films produced to feed the black hole of cable programming, the format has deteriorated into a stereotyped image of biologists peering through binoculars, turning the dials of arcane hardware, and pointing off into the distance at some animal while whispering so as not to scare the beast away. A famous voice narrates a sense of authority by reading a script that describes the sober facts concerning the particular human/nature relationship being depicted.

Few nature films bother to present the wild in the traditional sense, as a place of spirit or enchantment where animals are aware beings who communicate to one another. Few describe the cusp between humans and nature in the deep ecological sense of being a primary source of communion. Instead, experts do the best they know how to present data in the most entertaining way they know how. But it's still data, and nature is thus treated as a bag full of numbers and facts.

Permitting Access

Whale films are a special case. In fact, there is a legal reason biologist's faces appear in more whale films than anyone else with a new story to tell. With the best of intentions, the U.S. Marine Mammal Protection Act strictly regulates human access to cetaceans. Unfortunately, the American bureaucrats who grant the access permits–who serve as customs agents to the border between species–are all scientists who grant the coveted permits only to other scientists. This careerist approach to access makes it practically illegal for a non-scientist to draw close to cetaceans in American waters.

In my own instance, as an interspecies musician, it makes no difference that I play a guitar at a low volume. Nor do the permit givers care that I always transmit sound at a fair distance from a whale, allowing the animal to draw near if it likes. Ironically, when a whale chooses to stay away, I can not be cited. But if the whale draws close of its own volition, any whale cop who witnesses it is sure to cite me. Penalties can range as high as ten thousand dollars.

There's an insidious message implied by the ubiquitous presence of scientific experts. It is as if there are no children, no artists, no dreamers, no poets, and very few women or elders who have anything to teach the rest of us about the human relationship to nature. Instead, year after year, show after show, we watch a continuing parade of field biologists pointing and whispering and ultimately promoting the classic scientific schism between observer and observed.

The stereotype speaks volumes. For instance, regard the simple image of humans peeking through binoculars and whispering. The first part is a voyeuristic cliche that subtley magnifies our separation from nature. Whispering presents a metaphor for invisibility. Yet these days humans are probably invisible in nature nowhere else *but* in nature films.

One result is a generation of children who have grown up believing the fine art of comprehending nature is primarily a matter of astute observation and unwavering objectivity. Perhaps fine and good, although as a purveyor of metaphors, I wonder if our own culture's destructive separation from nature can be regarded as a function of this point of view. At the very least, let's add it in to all the other causes of ecosystem destruction. And let's figure out some way to change our media to embrace more integrative stories about nature.

One biologist friend of mine, whose face is often sought by film producers believes the physical limits of the medium causes a lot of the problem. Nature films are mostly made for TV where there's very little depth of field. He concludes that it's simply not possible to translate the fractal reality of nature onto a small screen without corrupting nature itself.

The piling on of cliched images suggests to me that the failure is also one of imagination. With nature *writing* emerging as a richly evocative art form, one can only wonder why producers don't borrow from established authors to devise more thought-provoking scripts.

Someone ought to try the dogged interview style to discuss the current biologist's epidemic of whale "darting" to collect genetic material. Talk to the usual gang of expert scientists, animal rights activists, and marine mammal bureaucrats. But don't question them about regulations, utility, or ethics. Ask each one of them to describe how it must feel to be shot by a dart commensurate in size to a whale dart. Also interview an equal number of bright people who don't make their living arguing the issue. Ask the Dalai Lama what he thinks. Ask children to draw how it must feel. Get the opinion of someone who channels whales. Ask a science fiction writer how people fifty years from now will judge today's darting epidemic.

Since whales have a slower metabolism than humans, speeding up the images might give an audience a better idea of how a whale actually perceives its environment. To a whale, the clouds may zoom across the sky. A migration between Alaska and Hawaii might progress at a velocity commensurate with telephone poles flapping across a car window on a road in the Nevada desert. Since engine noise is a significant issue to whale species whose primary perception of the world is acoustic, a film maker might add "visual noise" to his or her images to give a sense of the altered interface that occurs everytime film crews draw near a whale in a motor boat to take close-ups. The tighter the shot, the more aggravating the noise.

Wendell Berry once said that television is not a tool for education but for stupefaction. Georges Clemenceau once said that war is too important to leave to the generals. I say nature is too important to leave to a TV formula.

–Jim Nollman

Beluga Shaman Petroglyph, Russia

Alaska Film

by Patricia Sims

In an attempt to push the boundaries of the tired nature documentary format–and also explore new stories–a group of animal-oriented non-profits recently joined together with a film production company to create the film project: *Looking for Gaia in the Belly of the Whale*. Phase one took place this July, in Frederick Sound, Southeast Alaska.

The film's premise focuses on two protagonists: Jim Nollman of Interspecies Communication Inc. and Fred Sharpe of the Alaska Whale Foundation who meet in the Alaska wilderness to debate the merits and short-comings of science as a means of understanding and experiencing animals and nature. Amidst the sublime beauty of the natural world they discuss how we perceive and explain nature through science versus the ephemeral and often mystical experience of wilderness that can lend a sense of truth not always measurable. Their dialogue meets at the place where art and science cross over with the mystery of the whales' behaviour as their focus.

I am a Canadian film maker with much experience producing nature films for TV, including an award winning film about the issue of dolphins held in captivity. I collaborated on this Alaska production with another accomplished film maker, Michael Clark. The two of us experimented with some challenging methods of filming dialogue and the passage of time, including an innovative motion-control time-lapse system. The objective of the expedition was to combine our varying ideas on art, science, and the wild nature experience and how we can best translate this experience to the film medium.

The financing of film projects is at best a tedious and time-consuming process whereby the creative merits of the film are often subject to evaluation and mandates not always congruent with the filmmaker's vision. In order to avoid the laborious process of funding this project, a film we have termed an "experimental anti-nature-documentary nature documentary" we opted to finance the first phase of this project ourselves through the combined resources of myself, Michael Clark (creator of our digital time lapse system), Jim and Katy Nollman, IC, Fred Sharpe, and The Alaska Whale Foundation.

In this way we were free of any creative obligations to third party funders, enabling us to experiment with some innovative techniques of the medium. If we came back with nothing, we would only have to answer to ourselves. This is an important point, considering that we weren't sure if we would or could capture the essence of what we were after. As any filmmaker knows, funding your own projects is really putting yourself on the line, while it also demonstrates a belief and committment to the concept. We did this in spades.

Filming in the wilderness is always risky, because it's impossible to know beforehand what you are going to get. Filming in the ocean with whales amplifies the risk. It is an environment where a filmmaker must surrender to the fact that they have no control. This can be daunting to a filmmaker, since film making is largely about control.

Our risk-taking paid off. From the point of arriving in the remote Tlingit town of Kake, the two week cloud cover lifted to boundless blue skies, glorious warm sunshine and flat seas. This high pressure system stayed with us for the duration of our eight day trip, further enhanced by 20 hours of daylight and the nearly constant company of humpback whales.

We set up base camp on a small wild island and for the days that followed proceeded to unravel our respective ideas and creative methods. As the days went by, our "flow" seemed to encompass more than just the fine weather. Whatever we needed seemed to appear.

Here's just one of numerous examples. One of the discussions between Jim and Fred hinged on the significance of anecdotes in understanding whale behavior. Fred, who has been a leading whale biologist in the SE Alaska region for many years, seemed to avoid the topic. The next day, as if on cue, we received a call from some local boaters who had spotted a baby humpback whale with a crab pot buoy wrapped around its tail fluke. Fred, myself and Michael raced off in the Zodiac, located the pod and for the next 90 minutes found ourselves surrounded by 25 humpbacks in a kind of rodeo-like orbit as we attempted to free the baby from the buoy. We were successful, both in cutting the line from the whale, and in the filming. But what was most interesting was our encounter with the same pod an hour later. The whales came to our boat, as if to give thanks. It was Fred, the whale scientist, who felt this most strongly. Anecdotal? Anthropomorphic? Regardless, the incident seemed to break us through to the other side.

Other highlights included a vibrant and conflicting debate between Jim and Fred on the issue of subsistence whaling. The setting for this head-to-head took place at an old whaling station, in a place aptly named Murder Cove. The early evening sun cast an ironic, nostalgic glow on the rusty textured gears and shafts, reminiscent of the mechanistic and environmentally unconscious days of the Industrial Age gone by. Contributing to Daniel Dancer's project, Katy Nollman constructed a ZeroCircle from the rusted shards of an ancient winch once used to haul whales up onto the beach.

Throughout our trip the time-lapse camera clicked away, capturing the sun and tide rising and falling, turning the hours into seconds. Gaia smiled on us.

Apart from our whale rescue material, we managed to capture a number of the classic topside images of whales: breaches, tail and pectoral fin slapping and fluke display dives. But, more importantly, we have at our disposal the seemingly endless reservoir of whale footage from the research material of the Alaska Whale Foundation. Some of the most impressive humpback whale footage I have ever seen includes the cooperative feeding behaviour of these humpbacks in SE Alaska. This behaviour has been the subject of Fred's study in the region for all these years.

A group of four to fifteen whales form a circle around a school of herring. By trumpeting a specific feeding call, and sending bubbles through their blowholes, they create a shower curtain of sound and bubbles around the herring, disorienting and forcing the herring up toward the surface of the water. At this point, the

whales lunge to the surface in a rush of cooperative feeding, scooping up the herring, their huge baleen opened up like giant sieves.

From this point, the film will go into its initial editing stage. We will create a pilot which will serve as an example of the film's theme, technique and design, enabling us to secure third party funding to take the project to the next level. In this way, potential broadcasters, distributors and/or benefactors will have a clear idea of our creative approach and intention, without any surprises.

The next level of this project will involve more filming in Alaska next summer, some computer generated imaging, music and sound production. The ultimate venue for this project will be determined at that point, whether it be television, theatrical, home video, or film festivals. Ultimately, we are seeking to push the boundaries of the conventional, commercially driven nature documentary so as to somehow capture the spirit and experience of wild nature and its denizens.

IC in Russia

The Russian Academy of Sciences has invited IC director, Jim Nollman, to join an expedition in September to help interpret the hundreds of whale petroglyphs carved in cliffs in the Karelia district of the Russian and Finnish sub-Arctic. He will accompany an international group of art and shamanic scholars from Finland, Russia, and Estonia onto the muskeg to document and discuss the preservation of these petroglyphs, some of which date to 5000 BC. The trip will culminate with a conference on the subject held in Petrozavodsk.

Jim got involved with the petroglyphs during a concert he performed in Helsinki two years ago. The Finnish concert promoter had used a photo of one of the petroglyphs for the poster. It showed a shaman underwater, communicating with a beluga whale and shaking rattles. The man's lower body was transforming into a whale as he played. Knowing something about whale art and shamanism, Jim realized this was one of the most ancient depictions of a whale anywhere in the world. That it showed a musician clearly interacting with a beluga whale stunned him. As far as he could tell, no one in the West even knew about this art.

Jim wrote an interpretation of three of the petroglyphs for the Spring 1996 issue of the Interspecies Newsletter. The essay later turned up on a popular Finnish website.

As it turned out, his interpretation proved something of a sensation for the few Russians and Finns who had been studying the art. For two examples, The whale depicted in the poster is clearly a beluga whale, yet the anthropologists had referred to it only as a "sea animal". The racket-shaped rattles, which he'd seen used by Inuit in the Canadian Arctic, were thought to be some kind of weapon.

To understand why this art has been hidden for so long, it is essential to understand that the petroglyph area was located quite close to the Soviet's nuclear submarine bases on the White Sea. Joseph Stalin had done an ethnic cleansing of Finns living in the area during the purges of the 1930s.

Jim's interpretation was eventually publicised in the Finnish Media. People in Estonia, Russia, and Finland–who had never heard of the petroglyphs–started to realize this art was carved by their own Finno-Ugric ancestors. Furthermore, the central animal figures, including whales, swans and moose were the totems of these ancient people. In such a manner, an ancient earth story has been resurrected.

Over the past year, the petroglyphs have become much more public. They have also become a cultural magnet for Karelian-Finnish-Estonian collaboration, serving as an impetus for people working together for the first time ever, not only to study and interpret a common heritage, but also to preserve the carvings in situ.

The conference agenda is, as expected, heavy on academic anthropological interpretations and somewhat underrepresented by the ecological and cultural aspects. Jim has insisted that the confreres engage this subject, not merely as ancient art representing a quaint worldview that primitive people constructed from scanty information. In fact, we might just as easily perceive the petroglyphs as a vital message carved by far-sighted seers into the permanent medium of rock, to be read specifically by future generations. It seems no accident that the subject matter speaks so eloquently about correct relations between humans and animals. This is, of course, a subject about which we seem most lacking in good information as we near the new millenium.

To once again accentuate the common thread of this newsletter, regard the essential message of the petroglyph rediscovery as much the same story told by Daniel Dancer's Zerocircles, and Patricia Sims *Looking for Gaia* film. Each of these projects seeks to transform the current human perception of nature.

Jim has proposed to the Russian Academy of Science that next year's meeting be held further north, on the White Sea where a vastly depleted population of beluga whales still lives. In the spirit of continued collaboration, he hopes to gather together a group of Karelian, Finnish, and Estonian musicians to attempt direct contact with the belugas, following the explicit directions left in stone by the ancient carvers.

Attendance at the 3-day conference is covered in part by the Russian Academy of Science. All of the rest of the money needed to sponsor Jim's participation–including all transportation–was raised through IC. We thank everyone who heeded the call for immediate funding by sending us what they could, starting with a couple of $100 donations. This project also demonstrates the far-reaching influence of our newsletter which is supported entirely by IC members.

Any readers who have the wherewithal to donate at least $100 **on a very occasional basis**, and would be open to receive direct solicitations from us for future emergency funding as it arises, please contact IC.

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